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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000415

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON NEGOTIATIONS, HOSTAGES AND HUMANITARIAN
SITUATION IN KIDAL

REF: A. BAMAKO 00385
[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00366
[1](#)C. BAMAKO 00299

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Acherif ag Mohamed and Mohamed ag Erlaf, two leaders of the Tuareg commission that recently traveled to Kidal to meet with Ibrahim Bahanga and members of the Alliance for Democracy and Change (Ref A), have returned to Bamako to meet with President Amadou Toumani Toure and Minister of Territorial Administration, General Kafougouna Kone. Ag Mohamed and ag Erlaf intend to tell the President that Bahanga has agreed to a truce but continues to demand (1) a reduction of Malian military forces in the region of Kidal, (2) an inquiry into the April 10-11 execution of two Tuaregs, and (3) a return to the framework of the Algiers Accords. The local "Committee of Wisemen" in Kidal, which has helped negotiate previous cease-fires with Bahanga and is working with ag Mohamed and ag Erlaf, is currently exploring ways to either bring the Algerian Ambassador to Mali to Kidal or travel to Algiers to jump-start Algerian mediation efforts.

2.(U) On May 1 Bahanga released three of his 33 hostages to a Libyan diplomat in Kidal. The three soldiers were likely released for humanitarian reasons. On April 29 a Libyan cargo plane delivered 30 tons of rice, milk, sugar and cooking oil to the town of Gao in northern Mali. The items are destined for populations in the northern region of Kidal displaced by fighting between Tuareg rebel Ibrahim Bahanga and the Malian army. It appears that Libya sent these supplies on its own and was not acting on a request from either the Malian government or international humanitarian assistance organizations. There are rumors that one to three more planeloads of humanitarian supplies from Libya are en route.

3.(U) According to the Malian Red Cross, as of early April there were 3250 displaced people in the area of Tinzwaten, 800 displaced people at In-Boulal, and 3500 displaced people around Aguelhok. The group in Tinzwaten has been living in a wadi between the Malian and Algerian frontiers, about 6km from Tinzwaten, since fighting between Bahanga and the Malian army began in August 2007 (Ref B). The group at In-Boulal on the Mali-Niger border are Malian nationals who recently returned to Mali from Niger to flee fighting there. Those around Aguelhok fled into the desert following the March 26 attack on the town by Tuareg bandits. On April 31 Malian Red Cross officials estimated that 3000 people from the city of Kidal are also in need of assistance. These individuals fled Kidal following the April 10-11 executions of two Tuaregs (Ref C).

4.(U) Since August 2007 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Malian Red Cross has delivered 20 tons

of rice, 500 tarps, 2100 sleeping mats, 200 blankets, 1500 buckets and 3300 liters of cooking oil to the displaced people in Tinzawaten. No assistance - other than what arrived yesterday from Libya - has been delivered to those in Aguelhok, In-Boulal or Kidal. Red Cross officials are still in the process of trying to assess the needs of the displaced groups in these regions. The remoteness of Aguelhok and In-Boulal have significantly slowed this process.

5.(U) The ICRC's regional director in Dakar told the Embassy on April 11 that while he was concerned about the humanitarian situation in northern Mali, he did not envision a need for additional support beyond what the ICRC was already providing. Malian Red Cross officials, however, paint a somewhat different picture. On April 30 Malian Red Cross officials in Bamako and Kidal said they were increasingly worried about food availability and nutritional concerns for displaced populations as well as for those who remain in isolated northern towns like Kidal, and that more assistance was needed.

6.(C) Comment: It is promising to hear that ag Mohamed and ag Erlaf have returned with at least something resembling a cease-fire agreement from Bahanga. It is also reassuring to see Tuaregs not aligned with the Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC), like ag Mohamed and ag Erlaf, playing an increasingly important and credible role in negotiation efforts. Previous negotiations have been monopolized on the Tuareg side by ADC leader Iyad ag Ghali, whose motivations and interest in speaking for anyone other than himself have always been in question. Ag Ghali returned to Bamako a few days ago after spending several weeks in Tripoli. Tuareg

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contacts indicate that he intends to assume his new assignment to the Malian consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, shortly. While his departure from the northern Mali political scene will leave a vacuum at the top of the ADC, it may also provide an opening for more reliable and transparent negotiators like ag Mohamed and ag Erlaf. Ag Mohamed and ag Erlaf hope to report to President Toure and General Kafougouna Kone within days. It is unlikely, however, that this meeting will produce any new developments beyond perhaps increased pressure for Algeria to return to the mediation table. President Toure has already made clear his opposition to a draw-down of military forces in Kidal. He is also likely to tell ag Mohamed and ag Erlaf that an investigation - which Kidal Tuaregs do not regard as credible - into the April 10-11 executions is already underway.

MCCULLEY